I. COURSE DESCRIPTION

How do we account for the many similarities and differences within and between human populations? Axes of human “difference” – sex, gender, race, class, sexuality, religion, nationality etc. – have profound consequences. These differences shape not only group affiliation and identity but are often correlated with colonial and national histories, with organization of societies such as socioeconomic status, professions, work mobility, as well as stereotypes about personal traits and behaviors. Debates around questions of nature and nurture have raged on for several centuries. The biological sciences have been very important in the history of differences. Scientists have contributed to bolster claims that differences are determined by our biology – such as research on sex and racial differences, notions of the “gay” gene, math abilities, spatial ability etc. Conversely, scientists have also contributed to critiquing claims of difference – claims of the existence of “race” and racial differences, claims about differences amongst sexes, genders and sexualities. How do we weigh these claims and counterclaims?

In this course, we will explore both popular and academic writings - their understandings, debates and critiques of “difference.” We examine these categories systematically to evaluate claims of difference. We will begin with a historical overview of biological studies on “difference” to trace the differing understandings of the “body” and the relationship of the body with identity, behavior and intellectual and social capacity. We will then examine contemporary knowledge on differences of sex, gender, race, class, and sexuality. We will use several case studies to explore how scientific and experimental knowledge is produced. What is good data? How do we “know” what we know? The course will take up a range of claims about difference, their purpose and their consequences to examine what these studies of “difference” can tell us – exploring both what they tell us and what they do not. Using literature from biology, women’s studies, and science studies, we will examine the biological and cultural contexts for our understanding of “difference.” The course will give students the tools to analyze scientific studies, to understand the relationship of nature and culture, science and society, biology and politics.

II. COURSE READINGS

*Middlesex*, by Jeffrey Eugenides, Picador, 2007. Available at *Food for Thought Books, North Pleasant Street, Amherst*

**E-Reserves:** Articles available online through library electronic reserves. Enter —Subramaniam as instructor or Womensst290A in listed courses and enter the password: biology

**SPARK:** We will use SPARK throughout the course. Surprise extra credit assignments, news and information and discussion questions will be posted on SPARK throughout the course. Once you register for the course, you will automatically be added to the course on SPARK. You will use your OIT
username and password to sign into the course SPARK and access course information. Please contact OIT if you have any problems. Every student needs to be familiar with the site and check it regularly (https://spark.oit.umass.edu/webct/entryPageIns.dowebct). Many important announcements and assignments will be posted there and you are responsible for this information.

III. COURSE REQUIREMENTS

- You must be registered for both the lecture and discussion section. Attendance at BOTH is required and mandatory.
- Reading assignments must be completed by the class period for which they were assigned.
- You are responsible for knowing when assignments are due and handing them in on time. Dates of major writing assignments are in this syllabus. But other assignments will be given in your discussion sections. Absence from these sections on the day the assignment is due is no excuse for not handing in the assignment on time. It is each student’s responsibility to find out about assignments from someone in your discussion group or from your Teaching Assistant.
- For an absence to count as excused, you must submit an official certification as well as a 2-page summary on the week’s readings.
- Discussion sections will provide the opportunity to talk critically and analyze issues and topics. You will be expected to have completed and thought about all of the readings for each class.
- Videos and guest lectures are part of the class material and students are responsible for knowing the material.

We will follow all university policies on issues of Academic Honesty, Grading, Attendance, Examinations, and Absences due to Religious Observance.

Written Assignments and Exams

- **Midterm Exam**: One midterm exam on March 11 in discussion section
- **Two short exercises/writing assignments** (3-4 pages) due Feb 18 and April 1 in discussion section
- **News clippings**: This course deals with materials that are very relevant to our times. We encourage you to bring newspaper articles/clippings, stories for the news program, radio and television programs, the movies as well as conversations with friends and family. We will begin each class with such connections. You should post these on the discussion board on SPARK. During the semester each student must present at least 2 relevant links before the midterm and two after the midterm. In addition you should comment on someone else’s posting at least twice before and after
- **Final project**: A final project and presentation (Topic due March 4, Outline, April 8, Paper- May 2)
- **Discussion groups** are integral part of the class. Attendance and participation in discussion sections are factored into the final grade. Two unexcused absences or more will result in your grade being marked down. Non-attendance will result in an “F.” If you have an excused absence, you must submit a two-page reflection paper based on the readings assigned for that week. The paper is due the next class day.
- **Extra Credit Events**: Throughout the semester we will post extra credit events. Attend an event and write a 1-2 page summary of the event for 2% extra credit.

Grading

Final grades will be computed as follows:

- Discussion section (attendance and participation) 20%
- Midterm Exam 20%
- Final Project and Presentation 20%
- Written assignments (2 assignments- 15% each) 30%
- Online Discussion board (5% posting; 5% comment) 10%
- Extra Credit (2% per event) Upto 6%

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Discussion Sections

Discussions sections on Friday are not optional or add-ons. They are designed to be an integral part of the course and to provide an opportunity to clarify issues in your readings, films and lectures. We expect you to have **completed and thought about** all of the readings for that week and to be ready to engage in meaningful dialogue. In addition to their strictly academic function, sections are also places where students may talk about the ways in which the topics we address in this course may have touched their lives. **Attendance and participation in discussion groups will be 20% of the course grade.**

Academic Honesty

Academic dishonesty, in any form, will not be tolerated and you are responsible for educating yourself about the University’s official policy on academic honesty. Following is a summary - you can read it in full at [http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm](http://www.umass.edu/dean_students/rights/acad_honest.htm)

If an instructor finds that a student has violated the University’s Academic Honesty Policy, the instructor has the right to lower the student’s grade, or even to fail the student for the course. Students have the right to appeal such a grade penalty by an instructor. The University Academic Honesty Board, which must be notified by instructors of any grade penalty, reviews all student appeals. The Board may sustain or recommend modification of the penalty given by the faculty member, or may recommend sanctions exceeding those originally given, such as suspension or expulsion from the University. The Board may also recommend sanctions for offenders who have committed multiple violations of the Academic Honesty Policy but who have not appealed the faculty members’ decisions.

Accommodation Policy Statement

The University of Massachusetts Amherst is committed to providing an equal educational opportunity for all students. If you have a documented physical, psychological, or learning disability on file with Disability Services (DS), Learning Disabilities Support Services (LDSS), or Psychological Disabilities Services (PDS), you may be eligible for reasonable academic accommodations to help you succeed in this course. If you have a documented disability that requires an accommodation, please notify me within the first two weeks of the semester so that we may make appropriate arrangements. [http://www.umass.edu/senate/guide/GRAD_COUNCIL_COURSE_APPROVAL_GUIDE.pdf](http://www.umass.edu/senate/guide/GRAD_COUNCIL_COURSE_APPROVAL_GUIDE.pdf)

Ground Rules

Despite the size of this class, we are concerned about the quality of your experience. To that end, we will try to foster as much active participation in the course as is possible. Lectures will include time for questions as they arise, and discussion sections have been designed to continue the dialogue. Make use of office hours to continue class discussions, clarify confusions or to discuss any other problems you are having with the course. Because of the class size and the nature of the subject matter, it is necessary to set some ground rules:

- This class is **50 minutes** and we expect you to remain for the entire period. Late comers and those who begin to pack 5 minutes before the class period disrupt the class for everyone.
- Make up exams will only be given to students who have an exam conflict, a medical or unavoidable excuse. Ignorance of this rule will not constitute a valid excuse.
### IV: SCHEDULE

#### Week 1: Introduction and Background

**Wednesday, January 19:**
  [http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/steinem.menstruate.html](http://www.haverford.edu/psych/ddavis/p109g/steinem.menstruate.html)


**Monday, January 24:**

**Wednesday, January 26:**

#### Week 3: Binaries/Dualisms: Nature/Culture, Science/Society, Biological/Social

**Monday, January 31:**

**Wednesday, February 2:**
**Week 4: Biological Determinism/Social Constructionism**

**Monday, February 7:**

**Wednesday, February 9:**

**Week 5: Good Science/Bad Science?**

**Monday, February 14:**

**Wednesday, February 16:**

**Friday, February 18:** Writing Assignment 1 due

**Week 6: Intersectionality: Race, Gender, Race, Class, Sexuality, Nation**

**Monday, February 21– Columbus Day – HOLIDAY**

**Tuesday, February 22:**

**Wednesday, February 23:**
### Week 7: The Body: Our Changing Conceptions – General Frameworks

**Monday, February 28:**

**Wednesday, March 2:**

*Resource: [http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm](http://www.pbs.org/race/000_General/000_00-Home.htm)*

**Friday, March 4 – Topic for Final Project is due**

### Week 8: Sexualities

**Monday, March 7:**

**Wednesday, March 9:**
- Film, *Is It a Boy or a Girl?*

**Friday, March 11 - Midterm Exam (material up to March 4)**

#### SPRING BREAK: MARCH 14-20

### Week 9: MiddleSex

**Monday, March 21:** Discussion of the novel *Middlesex*

**Wednesday, March 23:** Discussion of *Middlesex* continued.
Week 10: Changing Conceptions of the Body: Brain

Monday, March 27:

Wednesday, March 29:

Thursday, March 31, 4pm, Speaker, Rebecca Jordan Young, author of Brain Storms.

Friday, April 1 – Writing Assignment 2 is due

Week 11: Reproduction – Past, Present, Future

Monday, April 4:

Wednesday, April 6:

Friday, April 8 – Outline for Final Project is due
Week 12: Genes and Difference

Monday, April 11:


Wednesday, April 13:


Week 13 & 14: Student Presentations

Monday, April 18: Patriot’s Day – HOLIDAY

Wednesday, April 20 & April 25 & April 27

- Presentation of Final Projects

Week 15: Conclusion: What should we do with “difference?”

Monday, May 2:


Final Project is due